

The Last Voyage of the Cutty Sark

By CLAIR PRICE.

HERE is a story which no youngster under seventy ought to approach. This youngster proposes to approach it with one eye on his typewriter and the other on his readers, ready to fade into the background as soon as one of the oldsters rises from his chair.

Capt. Dowman, a retired merchant captain, who lives at Flushing, near Falmouth, in the west of England, has just bought the old tea clipper Cutty Sark for \$18,750 to preserve her as a national memorial. As soon as she reaches Falmouth harbor he intends to rerig her to her old tea clipper style (she is now barkentine rigged) and to berth her in a position in the harbor where she can be easily visited.

She put into Falmouth in February, 1921, for repairs to damage sustained while running down Channel, and Capt. Dowman recognized her, although he had not seen her since he was an apprentice in the Hawksdale in 1894, when that ship tried to race the Cutty Sark on a voyage from Sydney to London ("needless to say, the Cutty Sark left us to windward in a few seconds"). Capt. Dowman at once tried to buy her, but when her Portuguese owners discovered that she was wanted for sentimental reasons her price went up at once. Since that time he has been negotiating with the Lisbon firm of Ferreira & Co., her owners since 1895, and the price, which has finally been agreed upon, is several times her commercial value.

So the old Cutty Sark is on her last voyage to "Falmouth for orders." Are there any of the oldsters around New York who grow young again at the mention of her name?

As for the young gentlemen who hover about the Chelsea Piers between voyages to-day I have no doubt that some of them have never as much as heard of her. For she belongs to an age when coal smoke had about the same standing at sea as the plague, and oil firing was an undreamed-of bit of devilment. Her ballast consisted of strips of iron fixed in her timbers and her motive power consisted of her captain, her crew and her canvas. All that the young gentlemen of to-day require to go to sea is a man on the bridge with a sextant and a man in the stoke-hole with a shovel, but in the Cutty Sark's day there were only a handful of men in the world with sufficient business ability ashore and the right mixture of caution and recklessness at sea to make racing captains. For such men the little thoroughbreds like the Cutty Sark, whether you could walk about their decks with a lighted candle or it was a job to get your soup, would do everything but talk.

Steam has reduced the little thoroughbreds to a memory and in their places to-day we have the 25 knot giants of the Cunard and White Star lines. And some day somebody will make his fortune by dredging up the ships' silverware which lies on the bottom alongside the Chelsea piers. Other times, other manners.

Whether the Cutty Sark was the fastest of the little thoroughbreds is one of those questions which must be left to the oldsters to decide among themselves. The American built James Bain, owned by the famous Black Ball Line, trading out of New York to Australia, claims to have torn off twenty-one knots an hour, and the Lightning, under the same ownership and on the same run, claims a day's run of 436 knots. If these unbelievable claims have been substantiated they far exceed

the fastest times of the British clippers, whose record the Cutty Sark holds with runs of 363 and 362 knots. It is more to the point, however, to compare the records of ships over a number of years rather than by days runs on longitudinal sailing; and for this purpose the Australian run is a better standard than the run home from China. The China Sea is a treacherous hole, in which records were made not so much by the speed of the ship as by the captain's recklessness in cutting corners, but the Australian run depended on the ship and the captain's driving power and nerve. If you take the six best runs of the Cutty Sark and her great rival, the Thermopylae, from the Thames to Sydney, you get an average for the Cutty Sark of seventy-five days and for the Thermopylae of eighty days. British seamen of the older school claim that these two ships were the fastest ever launched—a claim which may be committed to the oldsters around New York for adjudication.

It does seem probable, however, that the Cutty Sark is the last of the little thoroughbreds now afloat, with one possible exception. [In the lack of any data to the contrary I assume that none of the famous American clippers of the '50s is still earning its living at sea, for the great days of the New York and Baltimore fliers preceded the days of the great British built clippers.] The only exception which I know of is that of the Lothair, which was kept in the New York-Manila trade for years. She was sold to Genoese owners in the '90s, who sold her in 1906 to F. G. Plaggio of Callao, and although she disappeared from the register in 1911 she may be still knocking about the south Pacific with Callao as her home port. As for Ariel, Sir Lancelot, Leander, Norman Court, Titania, Taeping and the rest of the fine fleet which used to wait for the new teas at the Pagoda anchorage off Foochow in the '60s, all of them are gone. The great Thermopylae was sold by the Aberdeen White Star Line, under whose house flag she made her Australian runs, to Montreal millers in 1890, who put her to running rice between Rangoon and Vancouver, and who finally sold her in 1895 to the Portuguese Government. Curiously enough, Capt. Willis sold the Cutty Sark to the Ferreiras of Lisbon in the same year, and for a time the two great rivals lay in the Tagus together, the Thermopylae a training ship, renamed the Pedro Nunes, and the Cutty Sark a barque, renamed the Ferreira and voyaging once a

year she would doubtless have been good for several years to come, for when she was dry docked in London last year her Portuguese captain said he had never used the pumps. Although she is now 53 years old her old timbers are still sound, and her end would doubtless have come upon her as it came upon the one-hoss shay. Some day she would doubtless have suddenly fallen to pieces while becalmed off the Azores.

It seems safe to say of her that even if she is not the only one of twenty great British clippers built between 1860 and 1870 afloat to-day she is the oldest and certainly the most famous.

She was built to race the new teas home to England, and it is the tea trade which has made Old England what she is. It is England which invented Respectability and tea, whether the exquisite China they serve at the Foreign Office or the ordinary wet, warm and weak of the tuppenny tea shop, is still the very Rock of Respectability in England.

She was built in Scotland, where ships are a religion quite as much as a business. You will know what I mean if you have ever faced a gale of wind with a Scottish builder's plate at your back. I remember once going to sea in a salt rusted piece of scrap iron whose rivets were falling out and which leaked like a sieve. She poked her ugly nose out of the harbor late in the afternoon, and the seas came running at her as if filled with fury at the prospect of pounding her to pieces. I knew she was thirty years old and had no business to be outdoors after night, but I went and leaned against the Glasgow builder's plate she wore below her bridge and felt as safe as if she were in dry dock with her captain ashore and her propeller off.

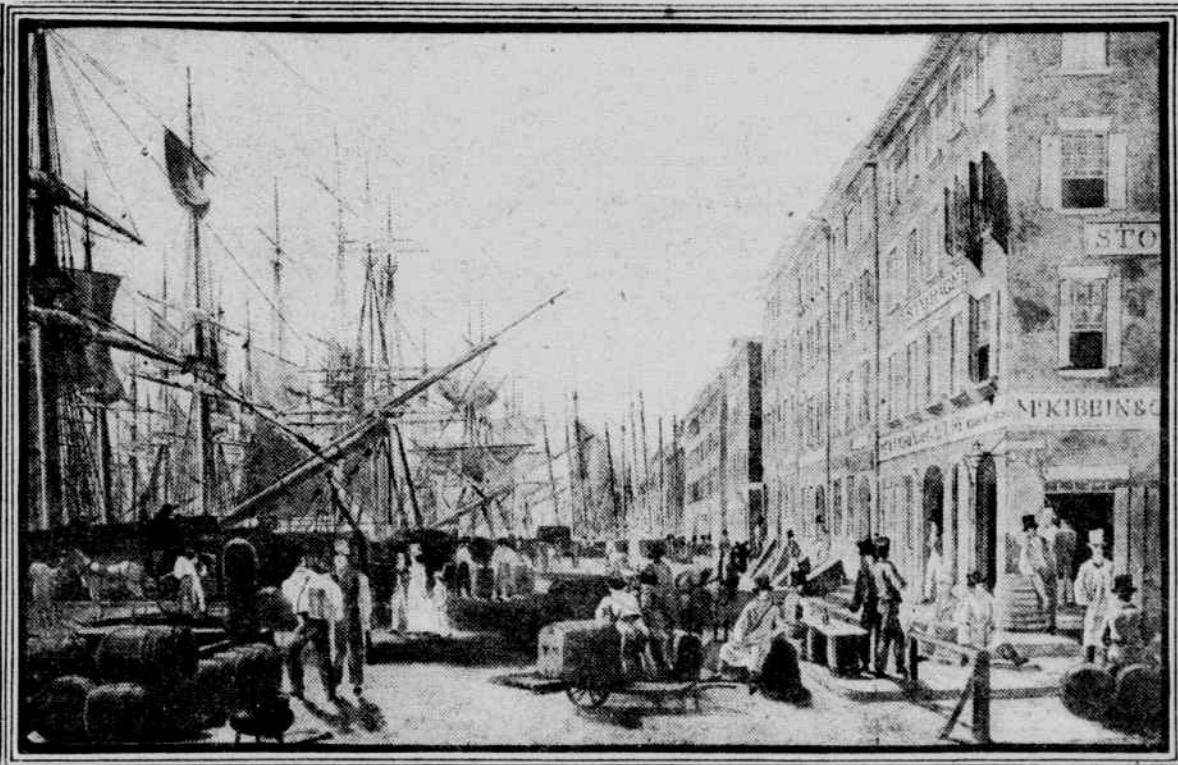
The Cutty Sark was built at Dumbarton in 1869, when Lloyd's was a coffee shop, when telegraphs were not as abundant as they are now, when 100 day voyages were the rule and owners met their ships at the pier head. John Willis built her to beat the Thermopylae and took her name from Robert Burns's most famous poem. It is Scotch for a woman's short chemise, and the Portuguese, who could make nothing of it when they bought her in 1895, called her for a time La Pequena Camisola. Her figurehead was Tam o' Shanter's beautiful witch, Nannie, with her long hair and cutty sark flowing in the wind, a work of art which rivaled the Leonidas of Thermopylae and the armed knight of Sir Lancelot. Her stern had her name in gold,

but had the elegance of curve and line which characterized the China clippers. Her sail area was of course tremendous, yet the beautiful proportions of her bow and stern and her poise on the water gave her an appearance of birdlike buoyancy and liveliness. She was not as fortunate as Thermopylae either in her winds or her captains, but like Thermopylae she continued to carry her full suit of racing sails and spars long after the rest of the tea clippers had been cut down. Yet even after her spars were reduced in 1881 she continued to make record passages to Australia under Capt. Woodget. Incidentally, both Capt. Woodget and Capt. Moodie, her first captain, are still alive in England, although the latter is now past 93.

She slid down the ways at Dumbarton when the tea races were at their height. The Falcon had won the races of 1859 and 1860 and the great Fiery Cross had won the next three races. Serica had come home in 109 days with the Fiery Cross and the Belted Will a day behind her in 1864, and in 1865 the Fiery Cross had the luck to fall in with a tug off the Foreland 106 days out from Foochow, while the Serica missed the tide and lost the race. In the great race of 1866 Ariel, Taeping and Serica had left Foochow on the same tide and docked on the same tide in the Thames after a passage of ninety-nine days, with Fiery Cross a day behind. Aside from its incidental commercial interest, there has probably never been a sporting event in history such as the tea race of 1866. To-day the blue ribbon of the seas is held by the steamer which makes the fastest time between Ambrose Channel and Daunt's Rock off Ireland, a trifling matter of five days' steaming, but in the days of the tea races the great captains like Keay of Ariel, McKinnon of Taeping and Innes of Serica—all of them Scotchmen—slept in their chairs when they slept and, except for their morning baths, never took their clothes off for more than three months. Those were the days when ships were ships and men were men. Is there any event in the world's life to-day which calls for such qualities of nerve and endurance?

It was in 1869 that the Cutty Sark slid down the ways and under Capt. Moodie's command went out to Shanghai in 104 days to load the new teas. In that year the Suez Canal was opened and steamers began cutting into the tea trade, but in the race of 1870 the Cutty Sark came home in 110 days, while the Thermopylae won with a 106 day passage from Foochow (Shanghai is some 500 miles to leeward of Foochow). Capt. Moodie took the Cutty Sark out to Shanghai the next winter in ninety-eight days and traded up and down the coast, running rice from Saigon to Hongkong until the new teas came down the river along toward April. There was a certain amount of excitement in the China Sea in those days, for the charts were not always correct, the pilots were none too reliable and pirates were still about. As the time for the new teas approached, however, the clippers left off coasting and took their shingle ballast, the only ballast suitable for a tea cargo. I believe the Cutty Sark always loaded at Shanghai, although the tea was never ready there until the monsoon was at its worst and the quarter and half chests in

which it came alongside at Whampoa and Foochow made better stowage than the full chests in which it was supplied at Shanghai. Doubtless this has much to do with the Cutty Sark's greater reputation on the Australian run than in the tea races. With the holds matted for the tea, the



Water Street, New York, in the Clipper Age, 1834.

year from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro to New Orleans and home. Finally, on October 13, 1907, two Portuguese men of war towed the old Thermopylae out to sea and ceremoniously torpedoed her, and the Cutty Sark became the last of the vikings, a great little thoroughbred now reduced to a cart horse's work. If Capt. Dowman had not recognized her in Falmouth last

with "Port of London" and the motto "Where There's a Willis Away." By this time the Portuguese have robbed her of her figurehead, but Tam o' Shanter's witch still dances as a dog-vane at her main truck.

In appearance she was a thoroughbred from truck to keel. She was not broad and handsome like the old Blackwallers,

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